



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: DECEMBER 12, 2006

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Scams are Alive and Well This Holiday Season

SACRAMENTO—The California Department of Consumer Affairs reminds holiday shoppers that they should never share their Social Security number, credit card account numbers, passwords, or any other personal financial information with someone they don't know.

Scam artists contact their victims on the telephone, in e-mails, and even through the postal mail.

Some of the recent scams that California consumers have contacted the California Office of Privacy Protection for assistance on include:

✓ **Hearing that you are the winner of a contest you never entered**

"It feels great to hear that you may have won something valuable, but if the contact person tells you that you have to give money in order to get something, think twice!" said Charlene Zettel, director of the California Department of Consumer Affairs. "This is rarely legitimate."

✓ **Being told that you can go on a shopping spree on your credit or bank accounts as a so-called "Secret Shopper," then be reimbursed.**

"The thief is trying to get access to your account numbers so *they* can go on a shopping spree and run up charges," said Zettel. "You will never be reimbursed, because that is not how mystery shopper companies operate."

✓ **Unbelievable mortgage refinancing deals, charitable organization holiday donations**

"Make sure you know who you're talking with by researching the company before doing any business or making a donation," Zettel warned. "Call corporate contact numbers and check to make sure addresses are real and not just a post office box. Always make sure you are confident that your contributions are being channeled into the organization, not a thief's pocket."

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✓ Marketing checks sent to you through the postal mail

“This may seem like free money—a check that is written in your name with the simple instruction to sign it and the money is yours. Look at *all* of the small print—including the area where you endorse the check on the reverse side. Sometimes you’ll find that the small print says your signature is authorizing a monthly deduction from your account or that you are financially responsible for sending money to that company.”

Don’t be fooled by these scams!

- Never give your personal information to someone you don’t know, unless YOU made the contact.
- Research companies you do business with BEFORE you buy anything, making sure there is a real physical address and a valid telephone number with representatives that can assist you.

“The Department of Consumer Affairs wants everyone to shop with bright, alert eyes that are wide open to frauds and scams so they’ll have safe and happy holiday shopping experiences,” said Zettel.

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For more consumer holiday safety tips, visit: www.dca.ca.gov or

call the California Department of Consumer Affairs, toll-free, at **1-800-952-5210**.